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DALLAS COUNCIL ON WORLD AFFAIRS
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WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE SOVIET UNION

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INTRODUCTION

THE SELECTION OF MIKHAIL GORBACHEV AS GENERAL SECRETARY IN THE SPRING OF 1985 SIGNALED THE POLITBURO'S RECOGNITION THAT THE SOVIET UNION WAS IN DEEP TROUBLE -- ESPECIALLY ECONOMICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY -- TROUBLE THAT THEY RECOGNIZED WOULD SOON BEGIN TO HAVE REAL EFFECT ON MILITARY POWER AND THEIR POSITION IN THE WORLD. DESPITE ENORMOUS RAW ECONOMIC POWER AND RESOURCES, INCLUDING A $2 TRILLION A YEAR GNP, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP BY THE MID-1980S CONFRONTED A STEADILY WIDENING GAP WITH THE WEST AND JAPAN -- ECONOMICALLY, TECHNOLOGICALLY AND IN VIRTUALLY ALL AREAS OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE.

AS A RESULT OF THESE TRENDS, THE POLITBURO RECOGNIZED THAT THE SOVIET UNION COULD NO LONGER RISK THE SUSPENDED ANIMATION OF THE BREZHNEV YEARS, AND COALESCED AROUND AN IMAGINATIVE AND VIGOROUS LEADER WHOM THEY HOPED COULD REVITALIZE THE COUNTRY WITHOUT ALTERING THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE SOVIET STATE OR COMMUNIST PARTY.

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IN GORBACHEV THEY HAVE GOTTEN MORE THAN THEY BARGAINED FOR. THE EXTRAORDINARY SCOPE OF HIS INITIATIVES, HIS ENERGY, AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO BREAK WITH PAST PRACTICES, HAS PROMPTED DEBATE NOT ONLY AT HOME BUT IN THE WEST AS TO GORBACHEV'S ULTIMATE OBJECTIVES. WITH ALL THE SPECULATION, IT IS WORTH TAKING A LOOK AT WHAT IS GOING ON -- WHAT HE ACTUALLY HAS DONE AND WHERE HE INTENDS TO GO.

STRENGTHENING THE LEADERSHIP AND HIS POSITION

THERE IS STRONG SUPPORT IN THE POLITBURO FOR MODERNIZATION OF THE SOVIET ECONOMY. WHILE POLITBURO POLITICS ARE ALWAYS OVER SIMPLIFIED AND OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD IN THE WEST, FOR CLARITY AND BREVITY ONE MAY PRESUME THREE APPROACHES TO MODERNIZATION IN THE POLITBURO. THE FIRST, LED BY GORBACHEV, SEES A NEED TO UNDERTAKE A FAR-REACHING RESTRUCTURING OF STALINIST ECONOMIC POLICY AND ITS SLUGGISH CENTRALIZED BUREAUCRACY, AND, FURTHER, THAT REAL MODERNIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE REQUIRES A LOOSENING OF POLITICAL CONTROLS -- INCLUDING CONTROLS ON INFORMATION.

ANOTHER APPROACH, PROBABLY BEST REPRESENTED BY LIGACHEV, IS THAT MODERNIZATION CAN BE ACHIEVED BY REDUCING CORRUPTION, BY IMPROVING MANAGEMENT (AND MANAGERS), BY MEASURES MAINLY

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DESIGNED TO MAKE THE EXISTING SYSTEM FUNCTION MORE EFFICIENTLY AND BY SOME CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM AT THE MARGIN. THOSE WHO HOLD THIS GENERAL VIEW SEE ALMOST ANY POLITICAL LOOSENING UP AS UNNECESSARY AND DANGEROUS. THE THIRD, MIDDLE APPROACH, PERHAPS LED BY PREMIER RYZHKOV, IS MORE ATTUNED TO GORBACHEV'S VIEW OF THE NEED FOR FAR-REACHING ECONOMIC REFORM -- THOUGH MORE SELECTIVE, BUT IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE DANGERS OF LOOSENING POLITICAL CONTROLS.

NONE OF THE THREE APPROACHES HAS A MAJORITY OF SUPPORT IN THE POLITBURO AND MOST INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS PROBABLY FIND THEMSELVES TAKING DIFFERENT POSITIONS FROM ISSUE TO ISSUE. NEARLY EVERY STEP GORBACHEV SEEKS TO TAKE TOWARD STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC OR POLITICAL CHANGE IS A STRUGGLE, AND SUPPORT IN THE POLITBURO FOR HIS INITIATIVES SHIFTS CONSTANTLY. FOR EXAMPLE, HIS PROPOSALS FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE AND FOR CONVENING A HISTORIC PARTY CONFERENCE WERE REJECTED IN JANUARY 1987, BUT ADOPTED IN JUNE. AND, DESPITE SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS IN JUNE, HIS PROGRAM HAD AGAIN RUN INTO TROUBLE BY FALL. BY YEAR'S END, HE WAS DISTANCING HIMSELF FROM THE RADICAL APPROACH TO REFORM HE HAD EMBRACED EARLIER IN FAVOR OF MORE POLITICALLY TENABLE MIDDLE GROUND. SO, HE FACES A DAY TO DAY STRUGGLE EVEN IN A POLITBURO WHERE A MAJORITY OF MEMBERS ARE NEW SINCE BREZHNEV'S DEATH. AND, AS WE SAW IN NOVEMBER WITH THE EXPULSION OF MOSCOW PARTY BOSS YELTSIN, EVEN HIS ALLIES CAN BE A HINDRANCE IN THE DELICATE POLITICAL BALANCING AND BARGAINING HE MUST PURSUE TO ACHIEVE PROGRESS.

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BELOW THE POLITBURO, SUPPORT FOR CHANGE -- AND ESPECIALLY FAR-REACHING CHANGE -- IS EVEN SHAKIER. OPPOSITION FROM THE PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND PARTY APPARATUS IS A CRITICAL PROBLEM FOR GORBACHEV. SENIOR LEVELS OF THE ECONOMIC BUREAUCRACY STAND TO LOSE THE MOST IF GORBACHEV MOVES TO DECENTRALIZE THE SYSTEM AND ARE IMPORTANT OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS PROGRAM. WHILE MANY SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY BUREAUCRACIES UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN A STRONG DEFENSE AND A HEALTHY ECONOMY, THEY ALSO ARE UNHAPPY WITH THE IDEA OF GREATER CONSTRAINTS ON DEFENSE SPENDING AND SKEPTICAL OF PROMISED BENEFITS. OTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE THE KGB, ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR INSTABILITY AT HOME AND IN EASTERN EUROPE CREATED BY ANY RELAXATION OF POLITICAL CONTROLS. THE SOVIET POPULATION SEEMS TO BE PASSIVELY SUPPORTIVE, BUT THEY HAVE SEEN CAMPAIGNS FOR CHANGE COME AND GO. THEY ARE SKEPTICAL THAT GORBACHEV'S EFFORTS WILL PRODUCE LASTING RESULTS OR EVEN IMMEDIATE PAYOFFS. THE INTELLIGENTSIA ARE PROBABLY THE ONLY GROUP THAT COMES CLOSE TO GIVING WHOLE-HEARTED SUPPORT.

IN SUM, GORBACHEV STILL VIGOROUSLY SUPPORTS RESTRUCTURING, HAS MADE HEADWAY IN OBTAINING POLITBURO SUPPORT, BUT FACES A LARGELY HOSTILE PARTY AND STATE BUREAUCRACY AND A CONSERVATIVE AND APATHETIC POPULATION. EVERY RUSSIAN AND SOVIET LEADER FROM PETER THE GREAT TO THE PRESENT SEEKING CHANGE OR MODERNIZATION

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HAS FACED FORMIDABLE OPPOSITION. BUT, UNLIKE THEM, GORBACHEV REALISTICALLY CANNOT RESORT TO WIDE-SCALE TERROR AND VIOLENCE TO ELIMINATE THOSE WHO STAND IN HIS WAY. HE MUST RELY ON A LONG TERM, LARGELY NON-VIOLENT PURGE OF PARTY AND BUREAUCRACY AND PLACEMENT OF HIS SUPPORTERS IF HE IS TO REMAIN IN POWER AND TO SUCCEED AT ALL. THE CENTRAL QUESTION IS WHETHER HE WILL GET ENOUGH TIME.

REJUVENATION OF THE ELITE

A PURGE IS UNDERWAY. EIGHT MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO ARE NEW SINCE GORBACHEV BECAME GENERAL SECRETARY. FORTY PERCENT OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IS NEW SINCE HE ASSUMED THE REINS.

THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER LARGE SCALE PERSONNEL REPLACEMENTS.

-- OF THE ELEVEN OTHER PARTY SECRETARIES, NINE ARE NEW GORBACHEV APPOINTEES.

-- 59 OF 105 MEMBERS OF THE USSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ARE NEW SINCE GORBACHEV ASSUMED POWER.

-- HE HAS APPOINTED TWELVE NEW DEPUTY CHAIRMEN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OUT OF FOURTEEN.

-- 47% OF THE OFFICIALS IN THE AGRO-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX HAVE BEEN REPLACED.

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-- 15 OF 20 CENTRAL COMMITTEE DEPARTMENT CHIEFS HAVE BEEN REPLACED.

-- 88 OF 157 REGIONAL FIRST SECRETARIES HAVE BEEN REPLACED.

BEYOND A SENSE OF PERSONAL JEOPARDY, MANY WHO OPPOSE GORBACHEV'S POLICIES BELIEVE THOSE POLICIES TO BE INHERENTLY MISTAKEN AND BAD FOR THE COUNTRY, THAT THEY ARE NOT IDEOLOGICALLY SOUND, AND THAT THEY COULD THREATEN PARTY CONTROL.

MODERNIZATION OF THE ECONOMY

ALTHOUGH BY 1985 GORBACHEV HAD BEEN ON THE POLITBURO FOR SIX YEARS AND A CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER FOR 14 YEARS, HE NOW ADMITS THAT WHEN HE BECAME GENERAL SECRETARY HE UNDERESTIMATED THE SEVERITY OF THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AFFLICTING THE SOVIET UNION. ACCORDINGLY, HE SEEMS TO BE INCREASINGLY RECEPTIVE TO MORE RADICAL PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE. MANY OF HIS RECENT REMARKS SHOW INCREASING FRUSTRATION OVER THE LIMITS IMPOSED ON HIS FREEDOM OF MANEUVER BY THE STALINIST-ERA ECONOMIC DOGMA HE HAS INHERITED.

ESSENTIALLY, HE SEEMS TO HAVE ADOPTED A THREE STEP APPROACH TO REVIVING THE ECONOMY. INITIALLY, GORBACHEV RELIED ON A

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COMBINATION OF MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN PARTY CONTROL, IMPROVE WORKER ATTITUDES, AND WEED OUT INCOMPETENCE -- WHAT HE REFERS TO AS "HUMAN FACTOR" GAINS. THE MOST VISIBLE AND DRAMATIC PART OF THESE EFFORTS HAS BEEN HIS CAMPAIGNS FOR DISCIPLINE AND AGAINST CORRUPTION AND ALCOHOLISM. THESE MEASURES ARE INTENDED TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND GNP SIMPLY THROUGH HARDER AND MORE DISCIPLINED WORK FOR TWO OR THREE YEARS UNTIL MOMENTUM CAN BE SUSTAINED BY THE SECOND AND THIRD STEPS -- GENUINE IMPROVEMENTS IN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH MODERNIZATION OF THE COUNTRY'S PLANTS AND EQUIPMENT, AND THROUGH ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REFORM.

THE JUNE 1987 CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM PROVIDED THE CLEAREST EVIDENCE SO FAR THAT GORBACHEV SEEKS A RADICAL OVERHAUL OF THE STALINIST COMMAND ECONOMY. THE BLUEPRINT FOR REFORM ADOPTED IN JUNE CONTAINS THE OUTLINES OF A NEW, MORE MARKET BASED MECHANISM FOR RUNNING THE ECONOMY THAT I BELIEVE GORBACHEV WILL PUSH.

TAKEN AS A WHOLE, THE REFORM MEASURES PUT IN PLACE IN GORBACHEV'S TWO AND A HALF YEAR TENURE ARE AN IMPRESSIVE PACKAGE THAT IN SCOPE AND SPECIFICITY GOES WELL BEYOND THE SO-CALLED KOSYGIN REFORMS ADOPTED IN 1965. NEVERTHELESS, THE REFORMS DO NOT GO NEARLY FAR ENOUGH. THE REFORM PACKAGE AS NOW CONSTITUTED IS A SET OF HALF MEASURES THAT LEAVES IN PLACE THE PILLARS OF SOCIALIST CENTRAL PLANNING.

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BECAUSE OF INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS AND THE RETENTION OF SO MANY ELEMENTS OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM, THE REFORMS HAVE YET TO BE IMPLEMENTED. EVEN IF FULLY IN PLACE IN 1991 AS INTENDED, THEY WILL NOT CREATE THE DYNAMIC ECONOMIC MECHANISM THAT GORBACHEV SEEKS AS THE MEANS TO REDUCE OR CLOSE THE TECHNOLOGICAL GAP WITH THE WEST. INSTEAD, THEY SPELL TROUBLE FOR HIS ECONOMIC PROGRAM GENERALLY. INDEED, AGGRESSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS IS CAUSING SERIOUS DISRUPTIONS AND TURBULENCE IN THE ECONOMY AND WILL CAUSE MORE AS THE BUREAUCRATIC FACTIONS ATTEMPT TO ADJUST TO THE MANY CHANGES BEING IMPOSED FROM ABOVE. SPECIFICALLY:

-- GORBACHEV'S QUALITY CONTROL PROGRAM IS DISRUPTING PRODUCTION.

-- NEW INITIATIVES IN ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT ARE CREATING CONFUSION AND APPREHENSION IN SOME QUARTERS, AND BUREAUCRATIC FOOT-DRAGGING AND OUTRIGHT RESISTANCE IN OTHERS.

-- DESPITE CONSIDERABLE RHETORIC, NONE OF THE PROPOSALS SO FAR GREATLY CHANGES THE SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC INCENTIVES THAT DISCOURAGE MANAGEMENT INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE.

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-- A SHARP DECLINE IN SOVIET HARD CURRENCY EARNINGS (THE RESULT OF FALLING OIL PRICES AND THE DEPRECIATION OF THE DOLLAR) WILL LIMIT MUCH NEEDED SPECIALIZED IMPORTS FROM THE WEST.

-- FINALLY, FOR A MODERNIZATION DRIVE THAT DEPENDS IN SUBSTANTIAL MEASURE ON HARDER WORK, THERE ARE FEW REWARDS FOR SUCH WORK. UNSATISFIED CONSUMER DEMAND IS REFLECTED IN CONTINUING LONG LINES IN STATE STORES AND RISING PRICES IN THE COLLECTIVE FARM MARKETS.

BEYOND THE SPECIFIC DIFFICULTIES FACING GORBACHEV'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM, THERE ARE BROADER REASONS FOR THE SHARP CONTRAST BETWEEN GORBACHEV'S RADICAL RHETORIC AND HIS MORE MODEST RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT TO DATE:

-- IT IS IN PART A MATTER OF TIMING. GORBACHEV, WHO HIMSELF CHARACTERIZED PROGRESS ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT SO FAR AS "INSIGNIFICANT" AT THE JUNE 1987 PLENUM, APPRECIATES THAT IMPLEMENTING HIS VISION WILL TAKE YEARS, IF NOT DECADES.

-- A SERIES OF OBSTACLES -- FROM POLITICAL RESISTANCE TO ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS -- HAVE SLOWED GORBACHEV'S MOMENTUM AND FORCED HIM TO COMPROMISE.

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-- BUT DESIGN FLAWS, GAPS, AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE NEW LEADERSHIP'S APPROACH, IN MY VIEW, REMAIN AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE PROBLEM.

THUS, WHILE IMPORTANT BATTLES HAVE BEEN WON IN PRINCIPLE, THE WAR TO CHANGE FUNDAMENTALLY THE MAIN PILLARS OF THE STALINIST ECONOMIC SYSTEM MUST STILL BE FOUGHT AND WON. AND, AS GORBACHEV PERCEIVES THAT THE CAUTIOUS CHANGE THUS FAR ACCOMPLISHED IS INADEQUATE TO ACHIEVE HIS GOALS, HE MAY SEE THE NEED TO TAKE MORE AND MORE RADICAL MEASURES AND DISRUPTIVE REFORMS IN ORDER TO MAKE FURTHER PROGRESS. THIS, IN TURN, WILL GENERATE FURTHER OPPOSITION AND CONTROVERSY.

POLITICAL REFORM

GORBACHEV'S PLANS FOR THE POLITICAL SYSTEM REMAIN LESS WELL-DEFINED THAN HIS ECONOMIC AGENDA. BUT HE AND HIS ALLIES HAVE SHOWN A GROWING CONVICTION THAT THE REVITALIZATION OF SOCIETY AND ECONOMY CAN SUCCEED ONLY IF THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA AS WELL. THE REGIME APPEARS TO BE MOVING ON AT LEAST THREE FRONTS TO CREATE THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IT SEEKS:

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-- THE FIRST IS IDEOLOGY. GORBACHEV IS FRUSTRATED WITH THE STRAITJACKET OF INHERITED DOCTRINE THAT OPPONENTS OF CHANGE HAVE SOUGHT TO IMPOSE ON HIM. GORBACHEV TOLD THE JANUARY 1987 CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM, THAT "THE THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF SOCIALISM REMAINED AT THE LEVEL OF THE 1930S AND 1940S." HE SEEKS TO EXPAND HIS ROOM TO MANEUVER BY AN INCREASINGLY OPEN ATTACK ON STAGNATION IN IDEOLOGY AND BY DEPICTING HIS OWN PROPOSALS AS AN EFFORT TO RETURN TO LENIN'S ORIGINAL INTENT.

-- THE SECOND FRONT IS DEMOCRATIZATION. GORBACHEV'S CAMPAIGN FOR "DEMOCRATIZATION" IS DESIGNED TO REVITALIZE THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. GORBACHEV WANTS TO SANCTION MULTIPLE CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN THE PARTY AND STATE APPARATUS BOTH TO HELP DISLODGE CONSERVATIVE OFFICIALS WHO ARE RESISTING HIS REFORMS BUT ALSO TO SANCTION A MEASURE OF DIVERSITY AND DEBATE. MOST OF THIS IS RHETORIC; THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY A FEW EXPERIMENTS ALONG THESE LINES, AND IN RECENT MONTHS EVEN GORBACHEV HAS BACKED AWAY FROM SOME OF THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS OF HIS "DEMOCRATIZATION" CAMPAIGN.

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-- THE THIRD FRONT IS GLASNOST, OR OPENNESS. TIGHT CENTRAL CONTROLS OVER THE FLOW OF IDEAS AND INFORMATION LIE AT THE HEART OF THE SOVIET SYSTEM. REMARKS BY GORBACHEV AND HIS KEY ALLIES INDICATE THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP BELIEVES THAT THIS APPROACH IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH AN INCREASINGLY WELL-EDUCATED SOCIETY, COMPLEX ECONOMY AND THE POLITICAL NEEDS OF THE MOMENT.

I SEE SEVERAL MOTIVES BEHIND GLASNOST, NOT LEAST OF WHICH IS USE OF AN APPARENT LIBERALIZING FORCE TO ACHIEVE SOME RATHER OLD-FASHIONED OBJECTIVES.

GLASNOST IS BEING USED TO CRITICIZE OFFICIALS GORBACHEV SEES AS HOSTILE AND TO PRESSURE THEM TO GET WITH THE PROGRAM.

IT IS BEING USED TO HIGHLIGHT PROBLEMS HE WANTS TO ATTACK -- SUCH AS ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE -- IN ORDER TO MOBILIZE SOCIETY BEHIND HIS CAMPAIGNS.

HE HOPES TO USE THE ATMOSPHERE OF GREATER OPENNESS TO COOPT INTELLECTUALS AND PARTICULARLY ENGINEERS AND SCIENTISTS TO BE FULL PARTNERS IN THE ATTEMPT TO MODERNIZE THE ECONOMY -- TO OVERCOME THEIR CYNICISM.

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BY ALLOWING UNORTHODOX CULTURAL WORKS TO APPEAR, GORBACHEV IS HOPING TO REDUCE THE INCENTIVE TO BYPASS OFFICIAL ORGANS AND PUBLISH MATERIALS IN THE UNDERGROUND PRESS.

IT ENABLES THE REGIME TO COMPETE WITH FOREIGN AND OTHER UNOFFICIAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION. SINCE THE POPULATION WILL HEAR ABOUT RIOTING IN KAZAKHSTAN AND THE DISASTER AT CHERNOBYL ANYWAY, GORBACHEV BELIEVES IT IS BEST TO PRINT THE NEWS AND PUT AN OFFICIAL SPIN ON IT.

FINALLY, HE INTENDS TO LEGITIMIZE BROADER DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS THAN PERMITTED HERETOFORE IN ORDER TO BREAK THE BACK OF DOMESTIC RESISTANCE AND INCREASE HIS ROOM FOR MANEUVER AT HOME. FURTHER, HE SEES THE EXPANSION OF POLITICAL DEBATE AS A NECESSARY STEP TO ACHIEVE HIS LONGER RANGE GOALS.

TO KEEP GLASNOST IN PERSPECTIVE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO OBSERVE THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO DIRECT CRITICISM OF GORBACHEV PERSONALLY OR HIS LEADERSHIP. SIMULTANEOUSLY, UNDER HIS AUTHORITY, THERE HAS BEEN CONTINUED REPRESSION OF SOME UNOFFICIAL CHANNELS OF

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INFORMATION, AND SEVERE REACTIONS TO NATIONALISTIC DEMONSTRATIONS SUCH AS IN LATVIA. WITH RARE EXCEPTIONS, ONLY THOSE IN GENERAL AGREEMENT WITH THE CENTRAL THRUST OF GORBACHEV'S POLICIES ARE ALLOWED TO VOICE THEIR VIEWS. IN SHORT, THERE HAS BEEN A MORE OPEN AIRING OF PROBLEMS, BUT ONLY A VERY LIMITED EXPANSION OF POLITICAL DEBATE. EVEN THIS HAS LED TO CONTROVERSY OVER THE POLICY ITSELF AND OPEN CRITICISM BY OTHERS IN THE POLITBURO THAT "OPENNESS" HAS GONE TOO FAR. GORBACHEV HIMSELF HAS CAUTIONED MEDIA OFFICIALS NOT TO GO TOO FAR LEST THEY UNDERMINE SOCIALIST VALUES OR CREATE A CLIMATE OF DISRESPECT FOR PARTY OFFICIALS. YET, GORBACHEV ALREADY HAS SET LOOSE FORCES THAT WILL BE IMMENSELY DIFFICULT AND PAINFUL TO LEASH -- AS MUST HAPPEN AT SOME POINT.

WHILE GORBACHEV'S BOLD POLITICAL MOVES AND RADICAL RHETORIC HAVE SHAKEN THE SOVIET SYSTEM, HE HAS NOT YET CHANGED IT. THE REGIME'S ACTUAL REFORM INITIATIVES HAVE SO FAR BEEN CAREFULLY CIRCUMSCRIBED TO INSURE THAT THEY DO NOT DEPART TOO BOLDLY FROM EXISTING APPROACHES. THE ULTIMATE FATE OF HIS VISION OF REFORM WILL DEPEND ON HOW SUCCESSFUL HE IS IN PUSHING AHEAD WITH ITS IMPLEMENTATION OVER THE NEXT DECADE IN THE FACE OF DESIGN FLAWS, ECONOMIC DISRUPTION, TREMENDOUS OPPOSITION AND, WORSE, APATHY. BUREAUCRATIC AS WELL AS POPULAR HOSTILITY IS LIKELY TO GROW AS DISRUPTION AND DISLOCATION BROUGHT ABOUT BY CHANGE

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RESULT IN ECONOMIC SETBACKS AND, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, A WORSENING SITUATION FOR THE CONSUMER. WHAT GORBACHEV IS SUCCESSFULLY CHANGING IS THE OFFICIALDOM OF THE PARTY AND STATE BUREAUCRACY. ONCE AGAIN, THE PURGE HAS BECOME THE VEHICLE FOR CONSOLIDATING AND ENHANCING PERSONAL POWER, AS WELL AS FOR IMPLEMENTING CHANGE.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN POLICY

THERE SEEMS TO BE GENERAL AGREEMENT IN THE POLITBURO THAT, FOR NOW, ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION REQUIRES A MORE PREDICTABLE, IF NOT BENIGN, INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT. THE ELEMENTS OF FOREIGN POLICY THAT SPRING FROM DOMESTIC ECONOMIC WEAKNESS ARE A MIX OF NEW INITIATIVES AND LONGSTANDING POLICIES. FIRST, GORBACHEV WANTS TO ESTABLISH A NEW AND FAR-REACHING DETENTE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE TO OBTAIN TECHNOLOGY, INVESTMENT, TRADE AND, ABOVE ALL, TO AVOID MAJOR NEW MILITARY EXPENDITURES WHILE THE SOVIET ECONOMY IS REVIVED. GORBACHEV MUST SLOW OR STOP AMERICAN MILITARY MODERNIZATION, ESPECIALLY SDI, THAT THREATENS NOT ONLY SOVIET STRATEGIC GAINS OF THE LAST GENERATION BUT WHICH ALSO, IF CONTINUED, WILL FORCE THE USSR TO DEVOTE HUGE NEW RESOURCES TO THE MILITARY IN A HIGH TECHNOLOGY COMPETITION FOR WHICH THEY ARE ILL-EQUIPPED. THE SOVIETS KNOW THAT DETENTE IN THE EARLY 1970S CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO DOWNWARD PRESSURE ON WESTERN DEFENSE BUDGETS, SLOWED MILITARY

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MODERNIZATION, WEAKENED RESOLVE TO COUNTER SOVIET ADVANCES IN THE THIRD WORLD, AND OPENED TO THE USSR NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR WESTERN TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

SECOND, A LESS VISIBLE BUT ENDURING ELEMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY -- EVEN UNDER GORBACHEV -- IS THE CONTINUING EXTRAORDINARY SCOPE AND SWEEP OF SOVIET MILITARY MODERNIZATION AND WEAPONS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. DESPITE SOVIET RHETORIC, WE STILL SEE NO LESSENING OF THEIR WEAPONS PRODUCTION. AND, FURTHER, SOVIET RESEARCH ON NEW, EXOTIC WEAPONS SUCH AS LASERS AND THEIR OWN VERSION OF SDI CONTINUES APACE. VIRTUALLY ALL OF THEIR PRINCIPAL STRATEGIC WEAPONS WILL BE REPLACED WITH NEW, MORE SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS BY THE MID-1990S, AND A NEW STRATEGIC BOMBER IS BEING ADDED TO THEIR ARSENAL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DECADES. THEIR DEFENSES AGAINST US WEAPONS ARE BEING STEADILY IMPROVED, AS ARE THEIR CAPABILITIES FOR WAR-FIGHTING. AS OUR DEFENSE BUDGET DECLINES AGAIN, THEIRS CONTINUES TO GROW, ALBEIT SLOWLY. GORBACHEV IS PREPARED TO EXPLORE -- AND, I THINK, REACH -- SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN WEAPONS, BUT PAST PRACTICE SUGGESTS THE SOVIETS WILL SEEK AGREEMENTS THAT PROTECT EXISTING ADVANTAGES, LEAVE OPEN ALTERNATIVE AVENUES OF WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT, OFFER COMMENSURATE POLITICAL GAINS, OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF US UNILATERAL RESTRAINT OR CONSTRAINTS (SUCH AS OUR UNWILLINGNESS IN THE 1970S TO BUILD A LIMITED ABM AS PERMITTED BY THE TREATY).

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THE THIRD ELEMENT OF GORBACHEV'S FOREIGN POLICY IS CONTINUED AGGRESSIVE PURSUIT OF SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND PROTECTION OF SOVIET CLIENTS IN THE THIRD WORLD. UNDER GORBACHEV, THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS ARE NOW PROVIDING MORE THAN A BILLION DOLLARS A YEAR IN ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO NICARAGUA; MORE THAN A BILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT WAS SENT TO VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA IN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF LAST YEAR; MORE THAN FOUR BILLION DOLLARS IN MILITARY EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN SENT TO ANGOLA SINCE 1984. AND, OF COURSE, CUBA GETS ABOUT FIVE BILLION DOLLARS IN SOVIET SUPPORT EACH YEAR. AT A TIME OF ECONOMIC STRESS AT HOME, THESE COMMITMENTS SPEAK CLEARLY ABOUT SOVIET PRIORITIES. THERE HAS BEEN NO REPUDIATION OF THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE.

THE FOURTH ELEMENT OF GORBACHEV'S FOREIGN POLICY IS NEW AND DYNAMIC DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES TO WEAKEN TIES BETWEEN THE US AND ITS WESTERN ALLIES, CHINA, JAPAN, AND THE THIRD WORLD; TO PORTRAY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT AS COMMITTED TO ARMS CONTROL AND PEACE; AND TO SUGGEST MOSCOW'S INTEREST IN DIPLOMATIC SOLUTIONS TO AFGHANISTAN AND CAMBODIA. WE CAN AND SHOULD EXPECT NEW AND BOLDER INITIATIVES INCLUDING CONVENTIONAL FORCE REDUCTIONS -- POSSIBLY UNILATERAL -- THAT WILL SEVERELY TEST ALLIANCE COHESION. SIMILARLY, NEW INITIATIVES WITH CHINA AND JAPAN WILL BE ATTEMPTED TO OVERCOME BILATERAL OBSTACLES TO IMPROVED RELATIONS AND TO EXPLOIT PROBLEMS BETWEEN THEM AND THE US. AND, IN THE THIRD WORLD, THEY WILL SEEK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ANY RELAXATION OF US VIGILANCE OR CONSTANCY.

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THESE NEW INITIATIVES ALSO ARE INTENDED TO BREAK SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY OUT OF LONGSTANDING TACTICAL DEADENDS AND TO MAKE THE SOVIET UNION A MORE EFFECTIVE, FLEXIBLE AND VIGOROUS PLAYER THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THE RESULT IS LIKELY TO BE A SOVIET POLITICAL CHALLENGE TO THE US ABROAD THAT COULD POSE GREATER PROBLEMS FOR OUR INTERNATIONAL POSITION, ALLIANCES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FUTURE THAN THE HERETOFORE ONE DIMENSIONAL SOVIET MILITARY CHALLENGE. CONSIDERABLE NEW THINKING, FLEXIBILITY AND POLITICAL AGILITY WILL BE NEEDED ON OUR OWN PART TO ANTICIPATE AND COUNTER SOVIET INITIATIVES AND TO AVOID BEING OUTMANEUVERED AND PLACED CONSISTENTLY ON THE DEFENSIVE.

CONCLUSIONS

THERE IS A NEW DYNAMIC AT WORK INSIDE THE SOVIET UNION AND IN SOVIET DIPLOMACY. WHILE ACTUAL CHANGES IN THE ECONOMY OR POLITICAL LIFE OF THE SOVIET UNION SO FAR HAVE BEEN MODEST, WHAT GORBACHEV ALREADY HAS SET IN MOTION REPRESENTS A POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE. ONE CANNOT, IT SEEMS TO ME, DISMISS WHAT HE IS SAYING OR ATTEMPTING AS SIMPLY NOISE OR MORE OF THE SAME, BETTER PACKAGED. HE IS PULLING ALL OF THE LEVERS OF CHANGE IN A SOCIETY AND CULTURE THAT HISTORICALLY HAS RESISTED CHANGE -- AND WHERE CHANGE USUALLY HAS BEEN VIOLENT AND WRENCHING. THE FORCES HE HAS UNLEASHED ARE POWERFUL BUT SO ARE THE PEOPLE AND

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INSTITUTIONS HE HAS ANTAGONIZED -- THUS SETTING IN MOTION A TREMENDOUS POWER STRUGGLE AND PURGE NO LESS DRAMATIC FOR THE ABSENCE OF SHOW TRIALS AND TERROR.

THE STRUGGLE IS ESSENTIALLY BETWEEN THOSE SEEKING TO PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO -- AND THEIR POWER IN IT -- AND GORBACHEV AND HIS ALLIES WHO SEEK TO REPLACE THOSE NOW IN POWER AND, IRONICALLY, TO TURN THE CLOCK BACK, BACK BEFORE STALINISM TO LENINISM. AS THE SOVIETS SAY, IT IS NOT BY ACCIDENT THAT GORBACHEV CONSTANTLY REFERS TO LENIN OR THAT OTHERS SPEAK OF THE OSSIFIED IDEOLOGY OF THE 1930S AND 1940S. GORBACHEV SEEKS TO RESTORE IN THE USSR A SYSTEM IN WHICH SOME -- THOUGH CERTAINLY NOT ALL -- ELEMENTS OF THE STALINIST ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND BUREAUCRACY ARE ELIMINATED THUS OPENING THE WAY TO GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION AND THEREBY TO MODERNIZATION AND IMPROVED PERFORMANCE.

IN THE POLITICAL ARENA, GORBACHEV'S LENINISM MEANS THE CONTINUED POLITICAL MONOPOLY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, ITS ROLE AS SOLE ARBITER OF THE NATIONAL AGENDA, ITS CONTROL OF ALL THE LEVERS OF POWER, AND ITS ULTIMATE AUTHORITY OVER ALL ASPECTS OF NATIONAL LIFE -- INCLUDING THE LAW. IT ALSO MEANS A MASSIVE PURGE OF THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY, NOW UNDERWAY. GORBACHEV'S OWN BOOK MAKES CLEAR THAT "DEMOCRATIZATION" SOVIET-STYLE DOES NOT MEAN MOVING THE USSR AWAY FROM MARXISM-LENINISM AND ITS ESSENTIALLY TOTALITARIAN STRUCTURE. I, FOR ONE, DO NOT FIND A RETURN TO LENINISM COMFORTING.

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WESTERNERS FOR CENTURIES HAVE HOPED REPEATEDLY THAT RUSSIAN ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION AND POLITICAL REFORM -- EVEN REVOLUTION -- SIGNALED AN END TO DESPOTISM. REPEATEDLY SINCE 1917, THE WEST HAS HOPED THAT DOMESTIC CHANGES IN THE USSR WOULD LEAD TO CHANGES IN COMMUNIST COERCIVE RULE AT HOME AND AGGRESSIVENESS ABROAD. THESE HOPES, DASHED TIME AND AGAIN, HAVE BEEN REVIVED BY GORBACHEV'S AMBITIOUS DOMESTIC AGENDA, INNOVATIVE FOREIGN POLICY AND PERSONAL STYLE.

THERE IS A CHANCE -- A VERY SMALL ONE IN MY VIEW -- THAT GORBACHEV IS SETTING LOOSE FORCES THAT NEITHER HE NOR THE PARTY WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL AND THAT, CONTRARY TO THEIR INTENTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS, ULTIMATELY MAY BRING A FUNDAMENTAL AND WELCOME TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOVIET UNION AT HOME AND ABROAD. AS WE HOPE THAT THIS REMOTE POSSIBILITY SOMEDAY COMES TO PASS, I WOULD ADVISE, IN OLIVER CROMWELL'S FAMOUS WORDS, THAT WE "TRUST IN GOD, BUT KEEP YOUR POWDER DRY."

ENDURING CHARACTERISTICS OF SOVIET GOVERNANCE AT HOME AND POLICY ABROAD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT -- WHILE THE CHANGES UNDERWAY OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UNITED STATES AND FOR A RELAXATION OF TENSIONS -- GORBACHEV INTENDS IMPROVED SOVIET ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE, GREATER POLITICAL VITALITY AT HOME, AND MORE DYNAMIC DIPLOMACY TO MAKE THE USSR A MORE COMPETITIVE AND STRONGER ADVERSARY IN THE YEARS AHEAD. WE MUST NOT MISLEAD OURSELVES OR ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE MISLED INTO BELIEVING OTHERWISE.

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HOW THEN DO I ANSWER WHETHER IT IS IN OUR INTEREST FOR GORBACHEV TO SUCCEED OR FAIL? I BELIEVE THAT TO THE DEGREE HE IS EVEN MODESTLY SUCCESSFUL THE UNITED STATES WILL FACE IN THE 1990S AND BEYOND A MILITARILY POWERFUL, DOMESTICALLY MORE VITAL AND POLITICALLY MORE ADROIT SOVIET UNION -- A SOVIET UNION WHOSE AGGRESSIVE OBJECTIVES ABROAD AND ESSENTIAL TOTALITARIANISM AT HOME REMAIN LARGELY UNCHANGED. I BELIEVE A STILL LONG COMPETITION AND STRUGGLE WITH THE SOVIET UNION LIE BEFORE US. SEEING THIS REALITY CLEARLY -- THE OPPORTUNITIES AS WELL AS THE DANGERS -- WILL BE AN EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGE FOR THE UNITED STATES AND THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES IN THE YEARS AHEAD.

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